HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

O.H 35

HILDA MAHER

Interviewed by

Patricia Young

April 16,1980

INTERVIEWEE: HILDA MAHER

INTERVIEWER: Patricia Young

SUBJECT:

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TRANSCRIBER: Linda A. Jantzen

PY: This is an interview with Hilda Maher for the Historical Society of Palm Desert Oral History Project on April 16, 1980, at her home on Royal Mobile Home Park . . .

HM: Royal Home . . .

PY: Royal Palm . . .

HM: Royal Palm . . .

PY: Mobile Home Park . . .

HM: Yes, on Date Palm.

PY: On Date Palm in Cathedral City.

HM: Yes.

PY: Let's talk about how you happened to come here.

HM: Oh.

PY: Particularly when you first came to Cathedral City.

HM: In 1936. In April of 1936. My husband and I had to break in a new car for his boss who was Mr. from the steamship line. And when we arrived in Los Angeles, we had four days of pouring rain, and he says,

"Oh, let's get out of here. Let's go to the desert." And I said, "Desert?" He said, "I have a friend there who sells dates and he loves it." So I had no idea what a desert would look like at all. So we started, and as we left Los Angeles, it was just black and gloomy. And the farther we came out this way, I saw this hole in the sky and it just looked like someone was throwing buckets of sunbeams out through. He said, "Gee, that's funny. I wonder what that is." I said, "I don't know." He said, "Well, that could be Palm Springs." So as we came through Banning in this way, the rain let up. We came into Palm Springs. It was gorgeous! People were sitting out in front of the Desert Inn and the coffee shop having their lunch. And this was Palm Springs. So we left, we drove out to Cathedral City, met his friend Wallace Gribble. And he showed us around just a little bitty town. I don't know how many, maybe fifteen, twenty-five people or so that lived there. So we looked around and come back into Palm Springs. Had dinner that night at what was Ruby's Dunes here in the last few years. It was then I believe owned it. Spaghetti place. So we had our dinner, came back and he said, "Gee, I like this place." I says, "Ye Gods! All

this sand!" So we went on back to Los Angeles the next morning and stayed a couple of days and came back. And we came back in the most horrible windstorm. And Mr. Hillery, who sold us our lot, and Jack Dempster, my husband, stood on a map showing where it was in relation to things around it in Cathedral City. And he bought it. And I wasn't at all enthralled with the desert at that time. So we went back to Menlo Park where we lived, and he decided we'd put up some cottages because by then we were already getting tourists all over the desert, the ordinary person that doesn't have to stay in a big hotel. Anyway, he said, "We'll just put up some cottages." I said, "Okay." So in September of that year I came back, the cat and I and all our belongings, and brought the carpenter who was going to build them with us, and we started putting up cottages. So we wound up with four, but anyway, and remodeling the little house that was on the corner for us. So tourists kept coming. There were so many and no place to stay to speak of in this area that we rented them many a night without even the bathroom facilities. They'd just have to use our facilities for the night. People who were just coming through and looking for an investment or something. And that's how we got here.

And then I stayed until 1939, 1940, when I remarried, stayed on that corner, run the cottages, worked at the dollhouse at the same time. So that was about it. That's the way we came. But during the summertime, like when everything used to close down on the day after Easter, all the workers around town would have different resorts to go to. So I usually headed for San Francisco because that's where I had come from. And come about August or July, oh, I had sand in my shoes by then, much as I didn't like the heat and the sand and all. Oh, I've just got to get back there! So I'd come down, make a trip, stay for a day or two, then go back to San Francisco and finish up what I was doing. Then come back for the season. And it just grew on you. And I'm not sorry, I can say that. Just absolutely . . . I never knew what a sandal was until I left San Francisco and got to a desert where your toes hang out and they get all that fresh air. And, oh, and wearing shorts. And I said to a lady across the street from me one day, I says, "You know, I don't care how old I get or how wrinkled up I get or how knotty my legs look, I'm going to wear shorts until I die." And, oh, just one of those things.

PY: Who was in Cathedral City then?

HM: The Hillerys; the Cobbs; oh, I know the names here; Pedersons, the Palmers, my sister and brother-in-law; people by the name of Kelly; and the Smedleys, who were there for many years; and Herbert Henry and his wife and family; oh, there are lots of them that aren't even in here; and the Crawfords. There were quite a number more, but I just, offhand I just don't remember. But those are some of the oldtimers who are still here and some who are gone, have passed on.

Here was something and we all started to look for them. And after them was, I never saw such a show as she put on. Of course, she was, for a time there, this is turned off, I hope.

HM: So that's how I got here. Now what else will we talk about?

PY: Well, you had these cottages; how long did you keep them?

HM: Until 1940, 1940 or 1941, sold them. I was remarried then again. I went to follow my husband back east where he was stationed. And then I had a son in 1944, Christmas day, so I came on home. He went overseas, and that was it. And we bought this little house there on Rio Del

Sol Road. Slept there about four or five nights and not a stick of furniture in the place. We just threw a blanket on the floor and that was it. And then went in and got some furniture. And that's how I landed on that corner. The house has a fireplace, we liked it, it was in the country, and we bought it. And at that time, that was a one-way road from Rancho Mirage from where the post office is down through the wash and up on the other side where we lived. If two people were coming towards each other, one had to wait until the other one passed. It was just dirt, and the road was, the dirt road was just past, oh, I think up as far as maybe, on Bob Hope which was about a block above Mrs. Clancey's. And we didn't get a pavement there sometime in the forties, after the fellows came back. Might have been 1946, 1945, 1946, 1947, somewhere along in there. And then it went as far as where Country Club Drive and Bob Hope is now. That was the end of the road. And then, let's see, sometime later, about 1950, 1951, somewhere along in there is when they opened Del Sol all the way through to Highway 10. Had a big celebration and, oh boy. And that was about it. And I've been here ever since.

PY: Who sold you your property in Rancho Mirage?

HM: Fellow by the name of Don Cameron who has been gone for quite some time. That's it.

PY: Had it been there very long?

HM: I think it was built in maybe 1937 or so, 1937, 1938, somewhere along in there.

PY: As part of a development or just . . .

HM: No. The closest thing to a development at that time in Rancho Mirage was a group of people came from Santa Monica, the Clanceys and and I forget somebody else by the name of Leslie, I believe. And they bought up a number of parcels and put houses on all of them, and then gradually sold them, but it was no big deal. The first living development was Tiera Del Sol which is just north of Sunrise Country Club now and it's still there. The first group building. And Palm Desert, of course, was building up, too. But mostly all private homes. Nothing, I think, what was the Blue Nun called? Which was the Blue . . .

PY: Firecliff.

HM: Firecliff was one of the first larger things like that. Then there was Doc Gurley who bought the, where Angelo's was, which was later Sun Sand Meat and Fish Company.

And across the road, as I said, there wasn't a great deal, but that was the truck or the vehicle depot for Patton's men. And that was all just raw desert, with the exception of just those buildings on Highway 111.

PY: What were they used for? Do you know who had them?

HM: What, the buildings?

PY: Yes.

HM: Well, there were all sorts of things. One was a little grocery store, an antique shop, an upholstery shop, that type of thing. Nothing really big or commercial like it is now.

PY: These were there before the war?

HM: Yes.

PY: On the south side of the street where Patton was.

HM: Yes.

PY: Okay.

HM: Yes. And Shadow Mountain was built after I came, after I was here for quite awhile, but I don't remember the year. It must have been . . .

PY: I think it was more like 1948, or something.

HM: That's what I was about to say. Oh, there's so much, but you just, over so many years you forget. You will just have to ask me what you want to know, and if I know

it I can answer it maybe. (chuckle)

PY: Who were your neighbors in Rancho Mirage at that time?

HM: Frank and Helen Clancey just diagonally across the street on the corner of Clancey Lane and Rio Del Sol. I'm insisting on Rio Del Sol. I'll keep saying it. Down the street were the And after we had been there a couple of years, Mrs. Deaton came and built a home, the third one east from Clancey.

PY: Is that right on Rio Del Sol?

HM: On Clancey Lane.

PY: Oh. Who's on Rio Del Sol beyond Clancey Lane as you're going north?

HM: There was Les Clancey who lived on the corner of and Rio Del Sol in the rock house. And then down Lane there were several people. And two of those, I'm sure, were Clancey, homes that some of the Clancey family lived in, whether it was father, grandfather or what, I can't tell. I don't remember because I didn't know them. And Doc Gurley lived down at the end of Clancey Lane at that time. And his sister-in-law or her sister-in-law lived in a house this way.

PY: Near Helen and Frank?

HM: Just about the fourth house down from Helen and Frank Clancey.

PY: Who had the Manana Ranch there?

HM: A Mrs. She was from the Castoria family, the people who did that Castoria thing. Now they were there, but I didn't meet them until several years later. The ranch was there. They were lovely people, both of them. Oh, the also where, up this way from Rancho Manana where Mrs., which was the Waters ranch later, and now the Waters daughter has just an acre in there. That's where . . .

PY: Lloyd Tevis?

HM: Well, it's just before Lloyd Tevis going east. And then it was Tevis house. Where Tevis is now wasn't there when I came. A Mrs. Fisher bought that whole piece of ground there. And then she split it up and sold one parcel to Doctor Adams where she originally lived at the far end, south end of that piece of property. And sold one to the VanDeCamp family, the bread people, and I believe the VanDeCamp house is the one that Mr. Tevis bought. I wouldn't be certain, but I think it was. And then Mr. . . . he's building those horsey houses, those beautiful homes, right next to Tevis going east.

PY: I don't know.

HM: Tenah, Mr. Tenah is building those, all those, beautiful

homes in there, which there was nothing much there then. He took in part of the Waters' ranch and another little piece of ground. I don't remember who that was from either. Let's see, who else? Then later, 1948, 1949, 1947, somewhere along in there, 1946, the Malones came and built way down at the end of Clancey Lane which is a budding Monterey Country Club that Mr. used to have, and now Sunrise has, the thing. That's about it that I can remember unless you ask me more questions.

PY: Sounds like a lot of L. A. people were in that area.

HM: Oh, yes. Everybody was coming to the desert then. A good many of our servicemen came back to settle in California after their little stint here during the service.

PY: How many acres did you have?

HM: Well, I think originally it was ten and some lots some year, maybe 1937, I took out a big chunk of it. And then when we bought it, it was seven and three-quarters or something like that. And then another time when there were floods came down, it took out another big chunk. We had the ground, but it was all down in the wash until the Coachella Valley Water District had to widen the

channel prior to the time that they built the bridge. And so it dwindled down to four and three-quarters acres, I think. Along with the fact that the county made a mistake of an acre and three-quarters in their whatever of surveys.

PY: Were you involved in agricultural pursuits like a lot of other people in the area?

HM: Not until after the war. We bought, I sold my place in Cathedral City and we bought ten of twenty acre, another man and my husband, and we put in grapes, Thompson seedless. And which is, well, part of it, part of that piece of acreage is Sunrise Country Club now. And Phil Harris since has bought what we originally owned, and I guess he's still got it. It's just across from Firestone's big house over there going, what, east.

PY: Firestones, I thought they were Thunderbird.

HM: Well, that's the Thunderbird area.

PY: Okay.

HM: Then it wasn't, Thunderbird wasn't built until 1947, I think, or 1946 or so. And then it was a horsey place. It was not a country club; it was a stables, you know, a . . .

PY: Dude ranch.

HM: Dude ranch. Right. And Mr. Bogert was there, Frank Bogert. So there were lots of horse, we were all horseback riders and all had horses, so there was a lot of travel between our house on Del Sol and the people from Thunderbird and up and down the road. It was fun then.

PY: What happened to all that?

HM: Progress they call it. That's what they call it anyway.

PY: Was there a feeling at that time that that would be maintained, that whole . . .

HM: I think we all felt that way, yes. But when the war was over, everything suddenly changed. Palm Springs, Palm Desert, everything, it just kept growing, growing, growing, which is fine, the development. But I think it's gotten to the point where it's just run away with itself. Where it's no longer fun going places because it's such a hassle. It's easier to just stay home or stay in your little area and forget it. Maybe it's because I'm getting so darn crotchety, I don't know. But, oh, we used to have some beautiful, beautiful times, and everyone knew everybody else. Maybe you didn't know the last name, but Tom, Dick, Harry, Joe, Millie or whoever she was, everybody knew Millie or Hilda or Helen or whoever it was, and you were all on a first-name basis. And then when

our celebrities used to come to town, like for Desert Circus or Eastertime or whatever, the local people all went to Palm Springs because of ChiChi's and a few other little bars and night spots, you know. There wasn't anything in Cathedral excepting one place. And there was nothing in Palm Desert I can, well, Firecliff came along shortly after. But we'd all congregate down in Palm Springs, everybody went. And, shoot, you could sit next to a billionaire and be just like you and I talking here. It didn't mean a thing. You were you and I was me. And everyone just had a ball. It's not like that anymore.

PY: Do you think it's changed the whole sense of community at Rancho Mirage?

HM: The whole what?

PY: Sense of community.

HM: I don't understand.

PY: Well, what you've described is a situation where everyone knew everyone else and felt comfortable, and there was a real strong sense of belonging to . . .

HM: Oh yes, yes. Oh, yes.

PY: Do you feel that that's changed?

HM: Oh yes. Everything is too commercial, commercialized rather. And, well, let's face it, there's so many people we all

have our little chores to do and our needs to take care of, and it's just hustle, bustle, bustle. Like yesterday, it took me about an hour to go to Rancho Mirage just to pick up my mail. That's how heavy the traffic was. Then, ye Gods, in the summertime you'd go down Palm Springs way or Indio way, shoot, you wouldn't run on to, this is a long time ago, thirty, any time between the thirties, thirty-six to forty, forty-one, you might run into eight or ten cars. And in the summertime, you'd go down Palm Canyon Drive, all the windows were papered up, Palm Desert as well. You wouldn't see a car. Of course, I like that kind of a free way of living. Lots of people don't, but I do. And when the season started, man, we, everything was jumping. It was little, but it was jumping. People just loved to come here. Now it's, I don't know.

PY: What was the attraction for people who weren't living here?

HM: Just the desert. Just the desert where you can see the gorgeous hills. We didn't have smog. We didn't have all this haze. Beautiful skies, beautiful weather. It was hot, but it wasn't, now it's so humid and hot. We didn't use to have humidity at all to speak of. We had our

sand storms occasionally and stuff like that. But the whole thing has changed because of the commercial end of it. You know, with all the irrigation, like in the golf clubs, and the people who put in vineyards and orchards and all that that takes irrigation, there's all that humidity. So it's changed. But, of course, you can't expect a place to stand still and not do anything. But it sure was fun then.

PY: Tell me a little bit about Cathedral City when you were there. That must have been something else.

HM: Well, Cathedral City was just as friendly as any other. I lived there from thirty-six to forty-one, I believe, yes. And everyone knew everybody else. We all, someone always had a party or a birthday or they'd have some, we had a little town hall, a little building that all the people in Cathedral City maintained and kept up and saw that we got where we had parties, potlucks. Like the Cactus Jumpers Jamboree, it was a little money-making thing for the Chamber of Commerce and it was fun. Or any other activity like that. Everyone knew everyone else. You'd go to over there in the cove on Pederson Road for a party, and shoot you might find fifty or sixty people there, just all neighbors from all around. And

just have a ball.

PY: How many people were living in the area then?

HM: Oh Lord, I don't know.

PY: A lot?

HM: No, not all that many. You mean between Cathedral City and Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert? Oh, I can't . . .

PY: No, I meant like in Cathedral City, just around town.

HM: Oh, golly. I wouldn't have any idea.

PY: Someone had told me recently that there were like eleven trailers and that was it in Cathedral City in the thirties.

HM: When I came in thirty-six, there were about three little motel things, the one store as I said which was the post office and gas station.

PY: Edna Cobb?

HM: Yes. Marvelous person. And the Hillerys were across the street from me on Broadway and Van Fleet in the real estate business and lived there. I can't tell you how many people there were. It was slowly growing though. All little houses were being built up above it. (cough) I would say maybe a dozen private homes plus a few, and I could be wrong, plus a few motels. that's one name I was trying to think of today. They were there and had a unit, I think six or eight units, or something like that up from Highway 111. Don't know what street.

Don't remember. And there was another lady. There were two or three and we were in the process of building, and we only had four cottages. Then gradually others were built. I'd say maybe there were a hundred and fifty people in Cathedral City when I came, or thereabouts all tolled.

PY: Was there a difference in how people felt about Cathedral City compared to Rancho Mirage?

HM: No, not to my knowledge. Rancho Mirage wasn't much either, it was just a small in comparison as Cathedral was when I first went there, so I went there, when I went to Rancho Mirage in forty-one, it was very, very small. There was a post office, the one store, it's in the area where Jergensen's is now. The gas station or two maybe. Rancho Mirage grew just like everything else, you know, over the years. You mean the, like they called Cathedral City Cat City which I just hate, that feeling of not being a very good town?

PY: Not so much that as that I've heard people say Rancho Mirage, we liked it because it was rural and it didn't have the sense of being a town as compared to, say, Palm Desert area.

HM: When I first went there, yes, yes, yes. Oh, yes. Because

Palm Desert became more commercial long before Rancho Mirage did. And there was more small commercial in Cathedral City than there was in Rancho Mirage. It was very rural.

PY: And I've heard others say that they liked Cathedral City because it was a small town where you could get things and everything was available and that it had a different, it was . . .

HM: The feeling was real good in Cathedral City. But as years go by, naturally, your whole picture changes. Different types of people move into different places and replace the originals for whatever reason, business or whatever. No, it was a real friendly, all, Palm Springs, Cathedral City and Rancho Mirage were all very, very friendly rural little villages, and it was a good feeling.

PY: Did Cathedral City grow up because of some need that wasn't being supplied in Palm Springs or did it have any relationship to Palm Springs in that way?

HM: Not really. I don't think. It could be that properties were cheaper to buy. It's more of a working man's town. All workers, you know, in whatever classification they are that do the jobs that need to be done on the desert, and for our tourists as well. That was probably one of

the reasons.

PY: Did it therefore attract a different kind of tourist, staying at your cottages?

HM: Oh yes, yes, yes. Because hotels were being built in Palm Springs, and Firecliff was being built in Palm Desert. This was after the war though. And quite a number of movie people would come down, into Palm Springs especially. And they'll stay at the Desert Inn which was there for years before, and at the El Mirador which was there for years, quite a number of years. And you wouldn't expect them to go to Cathedral City to a little cottage like I had, for example, because they were more affluent and they wanted, you know, a little more action. No, we just had the run of the mill tourist people in Cathedral City. It was a nice town, though, nice people. It was one of those places where if you're in trouble there are always a dozen people right there to help you. No questions asked, no nothing. We'll just help, we'll just do it, period.

PY: Is that still there?

HM: I doubt it. It's just as commercial in its way as Palm Springs or Palm Desert or Indio or any other place. Maybe your immediate little neighborhood, yes, but it was so

small then that everyone knew everyone else. And if someone was in trouble, why the word spread quickly. And in Palm Springs as well. But you don't find that now.

PY: Same true of the group in Rancho Mirage?

HM: Oh sure. All over.

PY: Was Rancho Mirage attracting a different group of people than Cathedral City, do you think?

HM: Yes. I can't just tell you what the difference was. There wasn't much commercial in Rancho Mirage, so whoever came more or less was looking for a place to live on the desert which they liked. And then commercialism, of course, came, had to come along with the building and so forth. And also, I guess property values were less than Rancho Mirage than in Palm Springs. Good many workers, no, not all that many workers, because Rancho Mirage is still a little bit young. We just incorporated, when was it? Gee whiz, I should know that.

PY: Seventy-one? Seventy-one?

HM: I believe so. Somewhere along in there anyway. And, of course, since then, well, like the whole country, I guess, you name it anywhere, it's just mushroomed, everything has. But not from individuals, the big money people. You know what I mean? Five or six guys, that won't record, will it?

PY: What did you use to do for entertainment?

HM: (laughter) Well, we rode horses I told you a great deal. Did a lot of partying back and forth between people or families.

PY: There were families there then at that time?

HM: Oh sure. And we'd go into Palm Springs. There were a few night clubs. ChiChi's was a very favorite place to go to, that was the first one. In thirty-six it was built, the end of thirty-six, and the one across the street that Earl Gray used to have the hotel, and I've forgotten the name was another place. They'd have entertainers and just drink and just meet people, that's all, and dance, and that was about it. They had movie houses there. Pardon?

PY: Go ahead.

HM: What were you going to ask?

PY: Did you frequent Desert Aire at all?

HM: Desert Aire didn't come along until about 1946 or 1947. Oh, later, yes, that was <u>the</u>, that should have been the hub of the valley, that little place right there.

PY: Why?

HM: I don't know. It was just, everyone came to Desert Aire and I worked there for six years, I guess. It had it's

own air field, and all their employees worked there and lived there because up this far there were no places for the working people to live. So in order to put up a hotel, you had to put up quarters for your help as well. Shadow Mountain was the same way to a point when it first started. Smoketree was the same way. They had places for their employees because there just wasn't places for working people to live, to rent. And, of course, a lot of that's gone now. You don't find many places at all that cater to their help or have to. Oh, that was a, all these planes would come in, and the cottages originally were old Army barracks that they cut in half and set at angles like this and made cottages out of them. And, oh, it was a fun place, just terrific place. Everyone just loved it. People from back east and fliers, of course, you know, they all know one another and they fly for people who live at Thunderbird or go to Palm Springs or whatever. And all the pilots would stay there at Desert Aire because their owners could, or the people who they worked for, could get in touch with them very quickly. And have their plane there and boom off they'd go. Oh, it was a good place, a real fun place.

PY: How were you working? What was your capacity?

HM: I was working the dining room, and it was fun.

PY: Why do you think Hank Gogerty had such trouble in hanging onto it?

HM: Why he had so much trouble?

PY: Why do you think in the end it had to be sold?

HM: Probably ran out of money.

PY: But not popularity.

HM: Oh no. It was a sad thing when Desert Aire folded. And he was getting older, too. He's a marvelous man. And then, like everything else, the property values go up and you've been established so long in a certain pattern, and in order to keep up with the time, you're constantly spending money to get up to snuff with the new things that are coming in. And, I guess, he was just running out of money, I would imagine.

PY: How about White Sun? Was that also a gathering spot?

HM: Not really. It was more or less private, and it's still the same way. It was a nice place. We used to go there for steak fries once in awhile or Chamber of Commerce things or Rotary or something like that.

PY: Oh, you were a member of the Chamber of Commerce?

HM: Well, we weren't, no. But other people would invite us. No, we weren't Rotary or Chamber of Commerce. They didn't

have a Chamber of Commerce in Rancho Mirage until the last ten years, I'd say, eight years, something like that.

PY: How did you feel about the move to try and incorporate the whole area as Palm Desert in the sixties?

HM: You mean Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage together? I don't think that I really felt anything, but I didn't like to, I don't know. I felt like the area we were in was just a little bit different than the other one. So if we're going any incorporating, I'd rather incorporate our area than be part of another.

PY: How was it different? You say there was some difference there.

HM: Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage you mean?

PY: Yes.

HM: Different in . . . Palm Desert was now becoming more or less commercial. There were more commercial building where you'd go shopping. And up until we incorporated in Rancho Mirage there wasn't much commercial in Rancho Mirage. There was a Safeway store, a post office, several real estate offices, a beauty parlor, Jergensen's across the street which wasn't, yes, it was Jergensen's then. Several gas stations. And there still isn't a great deal. One little liquor store. There still isn't

a great deal.

PY: That's true.

HM: Yes. You can get your car repaired and get your air conditioning repaired. You can buy a second-hand car now. Well, now it's just buildings up and down the street that are commercial. But the only thing, they never, now you and I, I've always been a hard worker, we do the chores as laborers so that the affluent are taken care of. Like when I was in the hotel business or the cottage business, it was my business to make them comfortable so they'd come back again. So I'm an owner, but I'm a worker at the same time. Now the people who work for me, maids or boys or men, rather, on the ground, they never built places for them to live. And yet you have to have those people in order to take care of our tourist trade. And I don't know where people get the idea not to supply places for working people that working people can't afford because they can't be in business unless they have a worker. And they're just not doing it and they haven't been doing it, as you know.

PY: Yes. Did a lot of people then come in from Indio?

HM: To work?

PY: Yes.

HM: I think more now in the last ten, fifteen years than ever before. Indio is quite small, too.

PY: So it was literally if you didn't supply housing for your employees . . .

HM: Well, at the time I went to Desert Aire, if you had a hotel where you had to have so many employees for each guest that came to your place, they had to come all the way from Palm Springs or all the way from Indio to put in an eight-hour shift. So in order to keep help and good help, they supplied living quarters, a good many of them did. Desert Inn, downtown Palm Springs years ago when I first came was the same way. They had quarters, dormitories, for men and women. The El Mirador also did. You can't keep help if they've got to hassle a long drive, an expensive drive, but that's no longer. Now they have no housing for working people to speak of. I mean that's within their budget.

PY: What was the background of the working people in the area? Did you find that they were mainly Hespanic or were they coming, I know that a lot of the people that, I've heard at least, a lot of the people that were coming into the agricultural area here were coming from Oklahoma, places where they'd been hit very hard in the thirties.

HM: Yes.No, I don't think we had as many Hespanic people at that time as have come in since. And I think this all started right after the war. Out of the percentage of Hespanic people here now is so much greater than it ever was. I think when they first started planting all the grapes, the dates and what have you, that brought in a lot of workers from Mexico who have settled here in the meantime and become citizens, a good many of them or most of them. Gee whiz, look, isn't that awful?

PY: So do you remember or recall at all the kinds of people that were working for you at either Cathedral City Desert Aire, wherever else?

HM: Kinds. By that . . .

PY: I mean backgrounds. I mean were they people who had grown up in the area here or were they people coming in from other states?

HM: No. Some of them, yes, were locals. I was a local because I had been here and I had property. But in any resort place, you'll always find employees from other parts of the country who want to work in a resort place. That was the thing. We'd go to Tahoe in the summer or we'd go to Balboa Beach to work in the summertime from here after everything closed up. And the same thing happens in other

parts of the country. People come here because it's a tourist oriented environment and they see a lot of celebrities, like in Palm Springs, for example, at that time. And it's exciting. You'll find that in workers anyway, excepting the farm workers, you know, like in the vineyards and so forth. It's exciting. And any service that caters to the public, like the food business, anything, entertainment business. Not necessarily, a lot of them are locals, yes, but not the greatest part of them, I don't think. Boy, traveling around from one resort to another was really something.

PY: Oh, you were part of that, doing that?

HM: Oh, sure. I was in the food business, too, in the hotel business. It's always exciting. And everybody that, I've met some marvelous, well-educated people in my travels who are just sick and tired of their little rut. So they're going to go to Palm Springs and work the winter season, for example. Or to Lake Tahoe and work the summer season. They'll do anything. Or they'll learn anything. And it's exciting. I worked with a teacher for three years. Oh, she was marvelous.

TAPE 1, SIDE 2:

PY: This was a girl your age, you say?

HM: My age then, yes. Because I was young once. (laughter) Anyway. She was a very brilliant girl, and she just loved what she was doing. Meeting the general public and catering to them, and then went back to teaching again. So you meet lots of nice people in all the categories.

PY: Yes. And it was that way in the thirties and forties.

HM: Yes. Everyone knew everyone else, and it was just great. Oh, same thing probably now, too. All the younger people that are working. They all know one another more or less, only there are so many. But they have their little groups, and they do for one another. And, you know, send them here or there. I heard so and so wants someone, and we did the same thing. It hasn't changed in that respect.

PY: Was there a feeling that it was just one large area of Palm Springs to sort of coming down the valley? In other words, was there a sense of identity of these separate communities in the thirties and forties, or was there a sense that it was just, everything was Palm Springs; this was just a little more on the outskirts

than that.

HM: Yes, I would say so because, now see it's been in the news and it's the place for people to go. And, as you know, we had many people who could afford to go. And Cathedral City or Rancho Mirage or even Palm Desert at that time didn't have the facilities to accommodate those tourists. This has grown up since, but gradually, as you know, they have. Like Palm Desert with its Shadow Mountain Club was one of the first ones. Now, of course, there's jillions of them, and Rancho Mirage has all of its clubs. Cathedral City is still more or less a working person's town, along with, there also have been successful in their business but they're not the country club type. You know what I mean, or the hotel type or that kind of a traveling type of person. There's some very lovely sections in Cathedral City. Oh boy, really, back toward the hills. Downtown is just like it always was.

PY: You said very lovely sections. Have they always been there or is that something . . .

HM: Oh, no. Over the years, they've been, it's grown, it's just grown toward the hills just like Rancho Mirage or anyplace else or Palm Desert for that matter anywhere.

But they all had their own little identity, as you say. And yet many of us knew everybody else in all these other places, where now you don't so much anymore. There's just too many people, but you can't avoid that, that happens.

PY: I was just curious because looking at the early literature from Thunderbird Ranch . . .

HM: Yes.

PY: Club and looking at Desert Aire, it all says Palm Springs on it.

HM: It all did, strangely. Desert Aire used to have a Palm Springs box number. So did Thunderbird. Well, look at our postal system, the way it is. If they had all these little towns, they didn't all have post offices at that time. They'd have to come under one big heading somewhere where the mail was being delivered, so it didn't . . . it was just one of those things. A lot of them. Rancho Mirage didn't have a post office until, golly, I don't remember when. We used to get our mail on the velt in the center of the velt, you know, this Standard station is here and trivia, whatever it is, on this corner, and in the center was a median and on it was all poles, and on those poles were our mailboxes. And that's where we

used to get our mail every day in Rancho Mirage when I first went there for any number of years. And a little bit later we had a rural route so they would deliver it out to our houses. We put our boxes there. They removed that line of boxes, put our boxes our in front of our houses. Clancey's corner had three or four boxes, and I had just the one because I was the only one on that side of the street. And then on up where Country Club Drive is now, there were another whole bunch of boxes that belonged to the different ranches around there. So it was rural, it was nice.

PY: Hank Gogerty told me that in thirty-nine, I think, when he first came out there that Don Cameron drove up behind him as he was entering his property and said, "I've got the one and only, one of two phones in town."

HM: He's probably right because we didn't, let's see, we didn't get a phone until just before my husband was inducted which was forty-one. Well, we bought that place in forty-one. And we were married in forty-one, January of forty-one, he left in February of forty-one, and I lived in Cathedral City when I had the cottages. I had no phone. I always got my messages across the street from the real estate office.

PY: Across the street. You mean up on 111.

HM: In Cathedral, yes.

PY: Oh, in Cathedral City.

HM: I was on 111 on the corner of Broadway and Van Fleet and the Hillerys were across the street in the real estate office. So that's where I did my phoning from.

PY: As well as everyone else?

HM: No, not really. That store, the general store, had a telephone and others. Then there was the One Thirty-nine Club, you know, the gambling club. And there was out here on Date Palm which burned down, oh, I don't know when, but, that the Workheimers had. And One Thirty-nine, of course, had their telephones and what have you. And when I lived there on the corner, I was on the corner here on the east side, and on the west side across was a chicken dressing place where this lady got live chickens,dressed them and sold them. And right next to that was the One Thirty-nine Club. It goes up this angle on A Street, I believe. And every once in awhile, I knew all the fellows and the girl over there at One Thirty-nine, and somebody would call ahead and say, "The Feds are coming to check," you know, to eliminate the game tables. And I had this garage. I drove a 1927 Packard,

seven-passenger car, if you can feature that. So one of the boys would call me from One Thirty-nine and say, "Hey, Hilda, can we use your garage? He says they're on their way." So I pulled my car out and get my truck, I had a truck because I was a garbage queen at one time at Cathedral City, but anyhow, go over there. I'd give it to the boys, they'd load it up with all their paraphernalia, put it in my garage, close the door. And then when the guys were gone, they'd come back and get it and open up again. So . . . Mr. Hillery could tell you, Robert Hillery, a great deal about Cathedral City. Now he was seven when I first came there. And he's been a very good friend of mine and the family as well throughout all the years. The family is now gone and Robert's the last one. And he could give you a lot of history from the Cathedral City area, an awful lot of history.

PY: Garbage cleaning. What is that? (laughter)

HM: I knew you were going to ask that. Well, I'll show you a clipping after awhile. When the man who I was married to then, Mr. Demster, and I separated, he had contracted to pick up the debris, like from the One Thirty-nine and all the private houses and the little cottages and places

that had been built in the meantime because we were growing. And when we separated, he didn't want to turn loose of this. He thought it would be something for the future, you know, picking up the refuse and stuff. So he said, asked me if I would take it over for him. I said, "Sure, why not." I'd do anything, didn't matter to me, I'm not proud. And this got to be quite a little thing. So I bought a truck, when I came back to Los Angeles I bought a truck, I hired a man and once a week or twice a week, whatever it was, I don't remember, we'd go around with the little truck and we'd pick up all this debris and stuff. Then we'd go across the wash, come up Date Palm. There's a wash-like thing. There were two washes, this big one and another one. And I had leased five acres there to bury all this debris. So we'd pick up the stuff, and I was working in Palm Springs, so I had polished fingernails and my hair was always nice because I was working for the public every day. And I'd man the truck. I'd drive it, and the guy would pick up the stuff, and away we'd take it out in the country and dump it and bury it, and park the truck again. This was a weekly affair. Well, it got to be a laughing thing in Palm Springs because then they had their Desert

Circus Parade, and all the local yokels were just as much a part of it as anyone else. And everyone had fun. Well, one of the papers in Palm Springs, Desert Limelight I believe it was, wrote a little article about this girl with the blue shorts and the white top and the red fingernails picking up debris. And I read this and I was just, I was so angry because I know who the people were. I can't think of her name now, wrote about it. And I read it again, and the more I read it, the funnier it got. And it got to be a joke. So anyway, I'm ahead of my story. Then in the Examiner, Pat Henry, Henry, whatever, Henry anyway, there was a little article in the Examiner about this girl in the blue shorts with the white top and the red fingernails. It was quite a little thing, you know, for a woman to be doing. So anyway, they had the circus parade, and they got poor Mr. Spaletti, he's, oh I guess, Italian or something, that had this route, garbage route that is in existence now, and he picked up all the stuff in Palm Springs. Well, they put on a skit at Desert Inn at one of their luncheons with Mr. Spaletti, or about Mr. Spaletti, and the girl that was his competition in Cathedral City. And it got to be so funny, even though I was angry at first. (laughter)

I did that for . . .

PY: That's a good way to get some free publicity.

HM: Yes, but I wasn't looking for any publicity. It was just a job to be done and as far as I was concerned, it was just a ball. You get to see all your neighbors around town that way.

PY: Get to know what they've got in their garbage, too.

HM: (laughter) Oh, shoot. That was funny. Do you want some more?

PY: No, that's fine, thanks.

HM: I guess I've told you about everything.

PY: I'm sure there's lots more.

HM: Oh, I'm sure there is, too, but . . .

PY: Sam Arner had a lunch counter or something, didn't he?

HM: Oh yes. He was in real estate. He didn't have that lunch counter, though, until later. Did he die? Just recently. Yes.

PY: Yes.

HM: He was quite a character.

PY: So where did everyone hang out, the One Thirty-nine Club there . . .

HM: Oh no. The local, even locals from Palm Springs, workers,

they wouldn't allow them to go there and spend their money at all. It was just the tourist trade and the people who, they lost a couple of thousand dollars it wouldn't hurt them, but not some worker like me or hundreds of others. If they lost their paycheck, they wouldn't get another one for a week or two. So they just didn't allow it, even though we were right practically next door. I couldn't go over there, so that's the way it was which was a good idea.

PY: How long did it last?

HM: One Thirty-nine?

PY: Yes.

HM: Oh, it had been there for years before I came, along with the one on Date Palm. Wish I could remember the name of it. Al Worthheimer's, well, whatever. One Thirty-nine lasted until Mr. Saucer died or left there, turned it over to Mr. Melrose and then Mr. Melrose died. And I think it was just about that time. Now when that was, I don't know. You'd have to look somewhere or I can call Mr. Hillery and find out. But it gradually, well, and then they raided. They didn't want gambling clubs in the area. And that was, they just closed, period. But I can't tell you when that was. It was in the early

forty, forty-one, thirty-nine. I believe it was forty-one, somewhere in there. Then there was no more gambling down here.

PY: But the locals didn't mind it being there at all.

HM: No. They couldn't go there, so they just found their other fun somewhere else.

PY: So where did people hang out? The grocery store and post office?

HM: They don't hang out like they do today, honey.

PY: Oh.

HM: We hung out at somebody's potluck dinner or somebody's birthday party or we'd high into Palm Springs and have a drink at all the different bars and have a little dance somewhere or go to a movie. That's about it. They used to have a dance place. Highway lll as you leave Palm Springs, oh, I don't remember the name of it, and they had a dance there, I think, once a week. And that's where all of us local working people would go because they had a big floor and always good music. And I don't even remember the name of it. That was one place we'd go. But aside from that, it was just movies and the local bars and the local entertainment and the dance place that I'm talking about. That was about it. There

wasn't all that much, but we sure enjoyed what we had.

PY: Did you raise children then at Rancho Mirage?

HM: I had one son. I have one son.

PY: And he was raised in Rancho Mirage?

HM: Oh yes. He was born in forty-four, Christmas day. His father was overseas. And he has a studio in Palm Springs. He's a photographer. He was in the Army afterwards. We had a hotel in Palm Springs in sixty-three and sixty-four we sold it, Mr. Hillery and I. And that's when he went into the service. And eventually after his preliminary moves, Texas, Denver and so forth, they, he was stationed at Bermuda for the rest of the time and never did become active in the service. That's where he learned his photography, and then pursued it after he got home at the Brooks Institute in Santa Barbara. And he now has a studio in Palm Springs.

PY: What's your son's name?

HM: Rob Maher, M-A-H-E-R. He called me just a little while before you came. He said, "Well, I read something in the paper about that last night." And I said, "Gee, I'm prude after being out there in that sun for so long." He said, "Oh, it will be fun, Mom." He says, "Go ahead." So . . .

PY: He went to school in Palm Springs?

HM: Yes. Graduated in sixty-two. Yes. Started off, first, well, he spent five years actually while I was at Desert Aire at Elsinore Military Academy. And then came back and went to Indio High the first year because of where we were located on Del Sol Road. And he just simply did not like it, nor did I. The school was too new, and it didn't offer the children very much. So somehow I finagled, I don't know how I did it, but I did it, for him to go to Palm Springs, and he finished there. And then went into the service.

PY: Was it hard coming from an area where there weren't a lot of other kids? Let me ask this. Were there other children his age in . . .

HM: In Rancho Mirage?

PY: That general area, Palm Desert and . . .

HM: No, we had probably in Palm, well, no, not all that many, no. There weren't any children. And there were three children up the street and a few children up Del Sol. He really didn't have any playmates. There were a number in Rancho Mirage, but I didn't know them because I was a busy working mother at that time, and you just don't have a chance to meet all these people. So the answer to that was, look into military academies because I was

planning to go to San Diego. I had a job already booked for when Mission Valley Country Club was being built. I was to have a concession or whatever it was going to be, I don't know. But anyway, so I was eyeing that, and Elsinore wouldn't be very far. I could see him every week. And I made enough money, I would be making enough money where I could afford the tuition, and myself, too. But that never panned out, but he stayed there for five years and I continued to work at Desert Aire. I went to see him every single Sunday of the five years with the exception of a few storms that I could not get through to go. I don't know how I did it, but I did it. I worked part of a shift, hightail to Elsinore, leave exactly at four, get back and work the rest of my shift for that day. Needless to say, Monday I was a nervous wreck, dead, so I spent that in bed. Then went to work on Tuesday.

PY: Good heavens!

HM: Yes. But it paid off. I don't regret it one single bit. I have a lovely son, a good son, and we have a good rapport between the two of us. So it worked out fine.

PY: He went to school with Gert Keedy?

HM: Gert Keedy?

PY: Gert, I mean Barbara Keedy.

HM: Barbara Keedy, I think went to Indio. He may have gone that first year. Now I don't remember. During the war, Gert and her husband who has the drugstore, you know, the little restaurant there where what's his name's drug-store.

PY: Ed Mullen.

HM: Yes. Was. They had a grocery store during the war in Palm Desert across the street and down. And that's where I first met them. And then the kids I think I met through him going to school. And Bob having the little restaurant and Gert working in the different clubs and sewing. She used to visit someone. Oh, yes, I know, Mrs. Johnson, in the neighborhood. And we all became acquainted in Rancho Mirage. And that's how I met them.

PY: Did you know Mac Blankenhorn? Were you aware of him?

HM: Blankenhorn.

PY: Yes, in the late thirties he put together a subdivision in Rancho Mirage, and actually Ruth Wheeler . . .

HM: Blankenhorn?

PY: I think that's it. You know Ruth Wheeler? He married Ruth Wheeler.

HM: Doesn't ring a bell. Where in Rancho Mirage?

PY: Up in the cove, Magnesia Falls cove area.

HM: Blankenhorn or Blankenship?

PY: Well, I got Blankenhorn out of information.

HM: It could be, I don't know.

PY: Having known little of the gentleman, I don't know for sure.

HM: No, I don't. The name doesn't ring a bell with me at all.

PY: Okay.

HM: It's very possible. I was so busy working trying to make ends meet, I guess that I couldn't be bothered with who was building what where. Blankenhorn, no, that doesn't ring a bell with me at all.

PY: I was just curious, you know, if you were, or like when Ron Button started developing the area a few years . . .

HM: Oh, yes. He was here when I came, so I know Ron Button and his wife very well. And he was in real estate, so we always had a little project going somewhere.

PY: But he didn't actually have a subdivision that he developed.

HM: I don't think so. No. He sold a piece of ground that was supposed to have been a subdivision, but it never was, and it was down at the end of Clancey Lane where

PY: Off on Christian's place?

HM: Just up from Christian's school there's that electrical substation there, and it was on this side of the road. That was supposed to be a subdivision of some sort, but I don't think it ever materialized. I think came in there and bought some ground, and the Malones and picked that all up or whatever happened, I don't know. Mrs. Clancey could tell you about a lot of things in there. Her husband was in real estate, so she would be more aware of that than I would be.

PY: May I ask how much you paid for your acreage when you moved into Rancho Mirage?

HM: I'm ashamed to say it. Twenty-nine hundred and fifty dollars.

PY: For seven and a half or seven and three-quarters acres?

HM: Seven and a half, seven and three-quarters, whatever it was. I'd have to go back to the old tax bills. Twenty-nine hundred and fifty dollars. And it was called Rancho Pepperito at that time, and it belonged to a Mrs. who was an opera singer. What the heck was her name? Arthur, Arthur. I believe Mrs. Arthur. And, oh, it was during the sixties, fifties or sixties. Car drove in the yard one day over there on Rio Del Sol. She got out of the

car and looked around, and I had removed the date trees and some of the fruit trees because it was just, there weren't enough to sell it and it was just too much work to keep them up and do the work yourself or hire it done, so I had them taken out. Anyway, she says, "I'm Mrs. whatever her name was then, and we used to live here." And she said, "It was Ranchito Pepperita." I said, "Yes, I still have the sign, and I've always thought I'd put it up just for the fun of it." And she went on to tell me how they loved it and for what reason they had to leave, and then they sold it to a Mr. Miller. And it was from Mr. Miller who we bought it, through Don Cameron. Twenty-nine hundred and fifty dollars, would you believe?

PY: That was probably a lot at that point.

HM: I guess it would be. Yes. Oh, well. Pleasant life there, really. Headaches, heartaches and so on, but nevertheless pleasant. Whenever I'd go away, I loved my little house. Whenever I'd go away and then come back, I'd always kiss the front door, always (smack).

PY: Were you ever cut off by the floods?

HM: Oh yes. Because at that time in the forties, let's see, as I said, the road ended at where Country Club Drive is now.

PY: Yes.

HM: So if we had a flood down here, there was no way to get around to go to Indio or Palm Springs. And on one occasion, several occasions in fact, I had gone over to Cathedral City to see my sister and brother-in-law and started for home. It was about eight-thirty, nine o'clock at night or so. And this darn water was up there and I couldn't cross the wash. And I just lived right across the wash. So several of us were just sitting there, and along with another man who was riding on a black horse, and he says, "Leave your cars here and I'll take you over across the wash one by one on the horse," which he did. And we left our cars there until the next day, until the water subsided. And I said, "This is a heck of a note when you haven't even got a jug of wine or a hank of hair and a fireplace to enjoy where you're closed in like this." So, and another time, my husband waited, oh, it was Christmastime, he went out to get a Christmas tree. The ground was wet. So the sand packs and he could drive over this sand. He went out the back way, no road, I mean beyond Country Club Drive. Somehow he got to Palm Springs or Cathedral City, whatever, and picked up a Christmas tree. And came back and the wash was up. And, oh, it was roaring. And

here was this man up to here in this roaring water with all these rocks traveling, carrying this Christmas tree, so we'd have Christmas.

PY: That's devotion.

HM: That's devotion is right.

PY: How did you get supplies when you'd get cut off, or didn't last that long or what?

HM: Oh, didn't last that long. This, in recent years has been much worse. Well, you can understand that, all the . . . excuse me, I need a Kleenex. All this building and progress and what have you. (Grunt) that's just nut. I'm not even settled in here for some reason. I can't even find my dress shoes. I had a chance to go somewhere a couple of weeks ago. I said, "My God, I can't find my shoes." They're someplace. Somewhere in there. Now, what else do you want to know? If I know it.

PY: Oh, my word. I don't know. (laughter)

HM: We're just rappling on.

PY: Did you hike or ride back up through Magnesia Falls?

HM: Oh yes. Ridden up there and hiked many times.

PY: Was there a lot of water there at that time?

HM: It's spasmodic, like the desert is, where you go up to a certain point and you'll see water come over the rocks,

but it doesn't amount to anything unless you'd have a storm. I've been marooned in Palm Springs, two days once and three days another time. There was no way of getting back to Cathedral City. When I lived in Cathedral City, we also had a dirt road that followed the mountain around, where Rim Rock, not Rim Rock, Rim Rock, Rim Rock, what's that road uphill towards Mr. Hope's place? Rim Rock, Rim Rock, yes, but it followed the contour of the mountain into Palm Springs.

PY: Instead of lll.

HM: Well, instead of straight lll now. Yes, that was lll as well then, but because all those washes, Tahquitz, where it did all that damage this year.

PY: Araby?

HM: Araby. That were all, I've got pictures that show the blacktop between Palm Springs and Cathedral City just chewed up. This must have been in thirty-seven, thirty-seven or thirty-eight. So you get into Palm Springs, you can't come back, so you just stay, period.

PY: Was it paved through Cathedral City?

HM: I think they have blacktop on it, just through the town of Cathedral City. I think they did, and it ended at the edge of town. I may be wrong. I just don't remember.

I'd ask Mr. Bogert. He could tell you. No, I think it was to the end of Cathedral City where they had the arch, and then it ended and then it was dirt until you got, oh, past Araby. Oh, East Palm Canyon, there was hardly anything there until you got onto Palm Canyon Drive.

PY: Frank Bogert . . .

HM: That seems like a million years ago.

PY: I imagine. Frank Bogert was telling me there were several ranches along toward East Palm Canyon, there's Deep Well Ranch and Smoketree . . .

HM: Deep Well and Smoketree, yes. And that was about it.

PY: Did you do riding in those days as well when you first came out here?

HM: No, not until, oh, about 1939, 40, something like that. That was when I was given my first horse. We had three horses there at, on Rio Del Sol.

PY: Is the house still there?

HM: It burned down. But it, somebody burned it down anyway, just right after I sold it. Beautiful wood, the old original pine, and nothing had ever been done to it, but oiled. And with all the nice detail, you know, that you can't find anymore. You just don't buy it, period.

PY: When had the house been built, do you know?

HM: I think I told you in 1937 or 1938, somewhere along in there. And it would be there another forty years with some work done to it. Nice, comfortable, cozy house. Everyone that ever came to our house said, "Gee, this is so cozy." Maybe we didn't have furniture, just sat on boxes, but it didn't matter. It was always a homey, homey place. The doors were never closed and the coffee pot was always on.

PY: Sounds like a nice place to grow up.

HM: It is. It was. But, as I said, there weren't many children to play with. Being a lone child, it's a little bit difficult. So when he went to military the first few years he loved it.

PY: Anything else you can think of?

HM: Oh, there's probably a lot of things I can think of as you reminisce, but . . . Well, just give me some clues.

PY: (laughter) I'm running out of clues.

HM: (laughter)

PY: Was it always busy at Desert Aire? Was there any, let me just ask that one first?

HM: There were lull spots, you know, at the beginning of the season, end of the season. It was a very busy place, very popular place and a very fun place. And we'd have our

luaus every year and there was always entertainment, had a piano bar, and it was just a cozy, cozy, cozy place. Everyone who came there to stay, we've had a good many movie people stay there, a Lancaster, Elsa Lancaster, and what's his name? Meet Me on the Bounty. Oh, you know who I mean. Laughton, Charles Laughton.

PY: Oh.

HM: And, oh gosh, I can think of an orchestra leader, Hampton. Who's the lady that bought Desert Inn of Hearst's girlfriend or wife, William Randolph Hearst, maybe it isn't William, maybe it's a brother, Marian Davies. She and her sister used to come there often. She had this little dog that had a diamond-studded collar and she insisted on bringing it into the dining room. And, of course, that's a no-no. Oh . . .

PY: Frank Morgan come down there very often?

HM: Frequently, yes. He just lived up, back there in Magnesia Falls area. And his man. I forget what his name was. I used to play tennis with him quite often at Shadow Mountain Club. Oh, I can't think. Any number of celebrities at Desert Aire.

PY: And it closed in the summer.

HM: Yes. Well, there wasn't anything here in the summertime

like there is now. Who is the guy that sold the vitamins, he did numbers in pictures, and they shot at Desert Aire, oh, four or five times that I know of, segments of the movie. I know you know him as well as I do.

PY: Not Bob Cummings.

HM: Yes. Yes. And Hoagy Carmichael. Clark Gable was there. Someone said, "Hilda, do you know who that is?" And I says . . . "Do you know who you're waiting on?" I said, "No." And I went to the table, and the girls were just you know, big deal. And when he looked up at me, I looked at him, and I, "Clark Gable, well, I'll be." Of course, celebrities never turned me on. They were either, either liked them or you didn't like them, and most of them you liked. But I mean, just because they were celebrities didn't ever turn me on to where I'd just lose all sense of reasoning. And some people do. They just go to pieces. Let's see, who else used to come there? Hoagy Carmichael, Phil Harris, of course, always.

PY: Seems like he was a big part of Rancho Mirage.

HM: In what way?

PY: Well, just, he seems to be around it a lot. His name comes up a lot.

HM: He used to stop by the house quite often. As I said, the coffee pot was always on. He got coffee and shoot the breeze for awhile, then take off. Oh, I can see so many, but I can't think who they are.

PY: Do you think they came to that particular area or to the whole valley because they wouldn't be known and they could feel comfortable here?

HM: No, I think their main object was comfort. They could be themselves rather than be on, oh, what shall I say?

PY: Display?

HM: On display, yes. Because it was such a homey place. I mean, you just sort of belonged when you went there. Oh, who's the guy with the big nose? He just died last year.

PY: Durante?

HM: Yes, he was there often, nice man. Oh, shoot! Well, tonight I'll know all the names after you leave, but right now I can't think of them. It was a fun place. Everyone had fun. Everyone who worked, everyone who lived there, just had a great time. It was nice, nice working conditions.

PY: Hank Gogerty showed me a photograph of Santa coming in the airplane.

HM: Oh, yes. This was, he opened his, Desert Aire was always

a place at Eastertime and Christmastime for children. He catered to families, is what he catered to, or the people who owned the Ralphs stores, the original family and I've forgotten what their name is, they always came with their family. He catered to children, and at Easter it was the egg hunt with little gifts for all these children, just thousands of gifts it seemed like. Any kid, it didn't matter where they came from. And whether they stayed there or whether they were in the neighborhood, whether they came from Indio or Cathedral City or you name it. And Christmas was the same way. And it would be all out around the pool, outdoors, and they'd pick up their gifts and talk to Santa for a minute. And usually it was, not usually but a number of times, one of the fellows that flew for Mc that has the saw thing, you know. Always had his plane parked there, Jim something, would play Santa and land with this big bag of gifts and things and distribute it to the children. This was Mr. Gogerty's thing. He just loved children. Expensive, I must add. They had something to eat, a snack, you know, cookies and milk or cookies and ice cream or what have you, along with their little gifts and have a ball, have a real good time. So it was a nice

atmosphere. And I think that's why a lot of these guests who did stay there, when they were all, when the cottages were all in very good shape because of the comfort and the comradery, the good feeling I think was one of the reasons.

PY: There was a black family in one of the photographs, and he didn't remember where it was from, you know, where if they were staff or if they were in the area. Do you remember any black families in the area?

HM: Families in the area?

PY: Well, it was a man and woman and little child.

HM: Were they, he didn't know whether they were part of Desert Aire?

PY: He didn't remember.

HM: If I saw the face, I might know. I know in the men's dormitory there were several black people living. We had a chef, yes, come to think of it, who's now at Coco 'd Oro, but they lived in Indio. But he did participate at our Christmas parties, the employees Christmas party or anything like that. And perhaps on Easter Sunday or on Christmas, they'd bring their child or children, whichever. And there was another black man who still lives there on the corner, but I don't recall him ever being

married, but then he could have been, or having a family.

PY: Oh, he still lives right around Rancho Las Palmas then? On the velt?

HM: No, across the street on the velt. He lives, oh, just after you cross the bridge going south, that first little group of three or four buildings in here, he has one of those with the original chef at Desert Aire who still lives there with his wife, Marian and Joe
And Roy lives in one of the little cottages there, works at the tram. But I don't think he was ever married, very nice man. And the other one who works at Coco 'd Oro, oh gosh, Fred Daniels, a beautiful man, had a beautiful wife who was a chef there or second chef for I don't know how many years. Real nice. But they lived in Indio. Roy stayed in the dormitory, as well as a good many of the girls. In fact, I lived in the dormitory five years when I sent Rob to military school. I'd move out of my house, come to the dormitory; Mr. and Mrs. Slocum who were at the hotel downtown and then I came to
Country Club, he was manager that year. And they had driven by my place, I saw his station wagon go by, and people going very slowly and looking. And I said to Rob one night, I says, "I wonder what those people want.

They've gone by here dozens of times, and I'm wondering what . . .

TAPE 2, SIDE 1:

HM: This car kept going by and by, day after day, very slowly but never pulled in until this evening. And she said, "Would this house be for rent, by any chance?" And I said, "Well, I hadn't thought of it. Give me an hour." Previous to that, the weekend before was the first time I had been in the food business for about fifteen years, and going back again because I was so darn broke. Mrs. Noyce from Desert Aire, who were the managers there, had called me one day and she says, "Hilda, would you help us out of the September holiday," what is it?

PY: Labor Day.

HM: Labor Day. I says, "Oh, my gosh," I said, "I'd be scared to death." She said, "Oh, come on," She says, "You'd get it." I said, "Okay." So I worked to Labor Day weekend. And I made, what I thought, was an awful lot of money. And she says, "Well, we'd like to put you on a regular salary." I says, "No, I have a job promised to me in San Diego." So the wheels started turning and I thought, why go to San Diego? This you've

got. That one you're not quite sure of and you don't know when. And you want to send your child to military school, so rent the house and that's a way to get out from under. So in an hour, I called the military school, asked them if they still had that opening for my son. She says, yes, I have two openings, but you get fifty dollars in the mail immediately and we'll hold it. I said, "Well, hold it because he'll be there." So I go back to the house and call the Slocums and I said, "Yes, the house is for sale, or for sale, for rent if you want it." "Oh, we want it." Now they hadn't looked, only coming through the kitchen and sitting on the divan in the living room. Okay, we made the deal right then and there, and I says, "Rob's got his opening for military school, and I'm going to work for Desert Aire in two weeks. I've taken a job there." He said, "Oh, that's great. That should be good for you." So for five years, six years, whichever, when the season ended at Desert Aire, their season would also end and they would go to Montana. I would leave Desert Aire dormitory, go back to my house for the summer months and use it because they had beautiful antiques and things in the house. And Rob would come home from military school. So we had

the house for the summertime when he was not in school. And then in the fall they'd come back first part of September or so, and I would go back to work first part of September. So I'd move back to Desert Aire, put my son in school, work all winter, and they would live in my house all winter. And they adopted a baby while they were there, Emory. And it just worked out beautifully. Just worked out beautifully. They loved it and I loved it because it allowed me to work without any cares as far as Rob was concerned. I knew where he was and what he was doing without worrying about it. And I was free to work. So it was, but that was my lifesaver, that job, and I loved every minute of it.

PY: Did the Bilkowitz come there often?

HM: Oh yes. Very often. They were lovely.

PY: Tell me something about them.

HM: Well, he'd always come in his black suit, and his, was it white boots, or white hat, white hat, I believe. And they came often for dinner. Very quiet, very nice, very kind. Everyone had a great deal of respect for those two, everyone. I mean, not just in the Desert Aire, but everyplace else. He was a very-much liked person. Oh, who else can I think of that came? Fullerton, the painter,

and his wife, but he's later. Well, not too awfully much later.

PY: Well, I've heard so much about him in terms of painting and what he did for . . .

HM: Yes. Gorgeous paintings.

PY: Yes. Did he ever display any of his work here?

HM: Not there, no. There really wasn't anywhere to display it because we had a play room. They had the round dining room.

PY: Yes.

HM: And then the lounge where the bar was, and a few tables. And then, you know, divan and chairs and comfortable place to lollygag and sit around and talk. Then they had the playroom where they had a pool table and Ping-Pong table. And I got to be quite a pool player, in other words, really. The pilots wouldn't have anything to do but just wait, wait, wait for a telephone call, so when we'd get through with our shifts, we'd often play with one of the fellows. And that's how I learned how to play pool. And it was fun. And the children, like on Sundays when families would come out with their children, they were always in there with the Ping-Pong table or the pool table, whatever.

PY: Did you spend any time at Shadow Mountain Club?

HM: No. We'd go swimming, yes, once in awhile. I was too busy working. I couldn't even take their special swimming thing for the summertime because I was just too busy working. Because all the area people, for so much money, whatever it was, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five dollars, whatever, you could be considered one of the guests, not members but guests, just for the summer season. And you'd have the privileges of the club. We went to a few functions, and they were fun. But it was . . . Lots of living was done in those days, kid.

PY: (chuckle)

HM: Good rhythms.

PY: What were you doing before Desert Aire? You said you'd been out of the food services for . . .

HM: About fifteen years. I got married.

PY: Oh.

HM: And had my baby.

PY: Oh, I see. You were just at home then.

HM: Yes.

PY: I get it.

HM: We rode with the Los Compadres, which are still active, I guess, to a point. We had our own horses there, the

three.

PY: Tell me about Los Compadres.

HM: That's a riding club. It's, oh, I guess it's not located there anymore. If you take across the bridge there at Araby and you look over to the right just back of the club, it's this way a little bit, Seven Lakes, there was stables there where a lot of the riders kept their horses. And they had functions there. They had the potlucks, and they had a bar and dances and things like that.

PY: You kept your horses there?

HM: No, no, no, we kept ours at home. We had a barn back there. Kept ours at home. But we were part of that group, riding group. We'd all meet different places and go for rides. And Del Sol I'd ride out many times just by myself, the old mare and I, we'd go up Del Sol to Annenberg Estates, and then it was all just sand, you could just look for miles. You get up on that knoll and you just felt like you just owned the world when you sat there on your horse.

PY: What was it like having Annenberg move in there?

HM: Well, we saw miles of these oleanders being planted, but no one seemed to know just what, who they belonged to or

what was proposed for the area or anything else. So it really didn't have too much of an effect. Group brought more development, of course, naturally.

PY: Did you know the Kerstens at all?

HM: Oh very well. Very well. We were buddies all the time. Oh yes. Do you know them?

PY: No. I understand that was the first packing plant.

HM: It was, here in that area. And then Mr. Schuler bought the place, the Riviera. And then, of course, Mr. Kersten died I forget how many years ago, three or four years ago. Very nice man, typical German. I just loved him. He had a son, who now lives in Indio and has for all these years. Smart man.

PY: He was not in there when you first moved to the area, was he?

HM: No. He came I think the end of forty-two or something like that, and planted his vineyard. And my husband became acquainted with him, and Incher and I became acquainted with he and his wife and their young son.

PY: Did that develop the area and was there a sense of expanding when he came in?

HM: Not necessarily just him. All of these things had been proposed in the meantime. Thunderbird was expanding.

We, in the meantime, had planted twenty acres in vineyard, so it all came about about the same time.

PY: Was there actually anything at Thunderbird before Frank Bogert put in the dude ranch?

HM: No, not that I, no, no. It was just bare land because I know at wartime, or forty-seven is when the club was built, wasn't it? The golf course and stuff.

PY: No, no, that was almost fifty-three.

HM: Wait a minute. Forty-seven. Well, it was, we used to go over there to dance whenever they had their weekend dances and people from over there would ride to our house and vice versa, and it was when they had the dude ranch. When they first proposed a club there, a golf club, my husband was laughing at Frank. And he said, you'll never plant any grass. You'll never get it to grow on that fan. He said, the first good puff of wind will blow it all away. And Frank says, oh, you'll see. Well, they had grass and nice green, but it could have happened. But that was the beginning of that type of operation in that area. And then there was, well, Ruth Warburton, and what was her husband's name? Johnny Warburton that lived back of Thunderbird in the little adobe house up there. And he used to come down from

Hollywood. She was a girl, I think. And we used to hobnob back and forth. Then something happened. They split up, whatever.

PY: That was the Red Roof Ranch?

HM: Yes, Red Roof Ranch.

PY: I understand they had great parties there.

HM: Oh yes. Yes,yes. Indeed. Well, it's nice to remember a lot of things. You get a lot of enjoyment out of it, really. The nice times along with the rugged times. I think I've just about covered it.

PY: Okay. Sounds like . . .

Go ahead.

HM: I had pulled up with this big old Packard.

PY: Where were you now?

HM: In Cathedral City to get five gallons of gas. I wouldn't get any more than that, just five gallons of gas. I was getting real impatient out there. I honked my horn, and she says, "Hilda, you'll have to learn that everyone takes their turn. You as well as everyone else." And I was angry. I thought, what a lot of nerve. Cash on the barrelhead and she's not interested. With that, she nonchalantly put the five gallons in my

tank and I paid her, grumbled, and went on. The more I thought about it, the more I felt, you know, she's got something there. And when I went to the post office a couple of days later and I had to stand in line, about four or five people ahead of me for general delivery, so I just yelled to her, "Edna, is there any mail for me?" over the five heads ahead of me or whatever. She just glared at me. She says, "When your turn comes, I'll see if you have any mail." Very quietly. That was my second put down. So with that, I talked with Mrs. Hillery and I was discussing with her how Edna had treated me. And she said, as a matter of fact, she said, that's right. You're very uppity up because you come from San Francisco, I guess, because I accepted the mail for you that's to be delivered, and it was supposed to be delivered on Thursday but it didn't get here until Friday or Saturday or whatever. And you were ready to send it back because it wasn't here on Thursday like they said. And I talked you into keeping it. You don't get deliveries on that day and time like you expect downtown. So I went home feeling very much put down and I thought, what am I doing that's wrong? There's got to be something wrong with me. And the more I analyzed it and thought about it, I thought,

well, shoot, I came from a city where everything is at your fingertips. Here I'm in the boondocks where everybody depends on everyone else. And I'm trying to spring in there ahead of everyone else and it isn't right. And they got me all straightened out. They're the best friends I've had, truly. Taught me a great lesson.